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Political empowerment of women in urban local bodies: A study of Rohtak district, Haryana

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Abstract

Political empowerment of women is a crucial aspect of democratic governance and inclusive development. Over the years, various constitutional amendments, policy interventions, and social movements have contributed to enhancing women's participation in urban governance. However, achieving full political empowerment remains a challenge due to social, economic, and institutional barriers. The Present study is an endeavour to examine the political participation and representation of women in urban local bodies in Rohtak district. It is an effort to study the political empowerment of women in urban local bodies. The research is based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of participation level, leadership roles, policy impacts, and socio-cultural bottlenecks.

Keywords: Political empowerment, women, urban local bodies, Rohtak, governance, representation

Introductions

The political empowerment of women in urban politics is an essential aspect of democratic governance and gender equality. Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or a group to make their own choices and encourage them in such a way as to translate those choices into defined actions and outcomes. One can understand it as a process, which involves exploring the human potential and enhancing human ability for the benefit of both individual and society. Women's representation in urban local bodies in India has evolved significantly over the years driven by constitutional mandates, policy reforms, and increasing emphasis on gender equality in governance. In the pre-independence era, women's participation in local governance was virtually non-existent due to strict socio-cultural restrictions. Besides, the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 offered only limited electoral opportunities without actively promoting female involvement. Even in franchise committee, the representation of women was nominal. After independence, in 1950, the Constitution granted women equal political rights including the right to vote and to contest elections; however, due to deep-rotted social barriers and a male-dominated political landscape their presence in local bodies remained minimal ^[1]. Later on the initiatives of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974), the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988), National Commission for Women (1992) and several other committees proved significant in attracting the attention towards more representation to the women at local level ^[2]. These efforts eventually led to the passage of landmark 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, which mandated 33% reservation for women in urban local bodies. This affirmative action spurred a phenomenal increase in women's participation over the successive years. Several states such as Bihar, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan went further by raising reservations to 50 percent, enabling women to assume pivotal role as mayors, chairpersons, and municipal councilors. Recent developments, including urban governance initiatives like the Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT, have continued to encourage female participation. By the 2025 elections, women have not only secured the reserved seats but have also stood victorious in open contests, reflecting a dynamic and ongoing transformation toward gender-inclusive urban governance in India ^[3].

Empowerment

Empowerment is the process of realizing and enhancing one's potential by gaining knowledge, developing skills and adopting a positive mindset to adapt to life's dynamic changes.

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It enables individuals to channel their talents toward achieving goals, building self-confidence and gaining recognition in society. Empowerment is relevant across all sectors whether agriculture, industry, or services and in specific contexts like fish marketing. It involves access to opportunities, support and technical knowledge for effective participation. It spans multiple dimensions, including psychological, social, economic, political, educational, legal, cultural, technological, environmental, emotional and gender empowerment, all of which collectively help individuals take control of their lives, make informed decisions and contribute meaningfully to personal and societal growth ^[4].

Political Empowerment of Women

Political empowerment of women is the process of transferring power, resources and opportunities to those traditionally excluded, ensuring their inclusion in democratic decision-making. It goes beyond the right to vote, encompassing participation in decision-making, political activism and consciousness. Women's involvement strengthens state accountability, responsiveness and policy-making that reflects diverse needs. In India, women actively vote and engage in political activism, with government measures such as reservations in local bodies and constitutional rights promoting equality. Despite historical low participation, women have contributed significantly since the independence movement. Indicators of political empowerment include representation in government, political rights and freedoms, access to leadership, civil society engagement, awareness, accountability, political inclusion, and fair electoral processes, capacity-building and active public participation ^[5].

Women's political empowerment in India has evolved significantly from the pre-independence era to the present. Before independence, women faced limited political representation due to patriarchal norms and lack of voting rights, though leaders like Sarojini Naidu and Kasturba Gandhi emerged during the freedom movement. The Government of India Act, 1935, granted partial voting rights, but their role remained marginal. Post-independence, the Constitution of 1950 ensured equal political rights, yet women's representation remained low, especially in urban governance. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) mandated 33 percent reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, laying a strong foundation for grassroots empowerment. Later reviews, such as the Committee on Political Empowerment of Women (2001) and the High-Level Committee on Women (2015), emphasized real leadership beyond proxy representation, capacity-building and financial incentives. Recently, the Women's Reservation Bill (2023) extended 33% reservation to Parliament and state legislatures aiming to strengthen gender equality in governance. Urban local bodies, thus, remain a crucial platform for women's active

role in grassroots democracy and sustainable development ^[6].

Urban Local Bodies in Haryana

The history of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in Haryana began with the state's formation in 1966, adopting the municipal governance system from Punjab. To strengthen local governance, the Directorate of Urban Local Bodies was created in 1982 and after the 74th Constitutional Amendment (1992), the State Election Commission, Haryana, was set up in 1993 to independently conduct municipal elections. Haryana currently has 11 Municipal Corporations, 19 Municipal Councils and 58 Municipal Committees, aggregating 88 ULBs. Over the years, several elections including those in 2013, 2018, 2022 and 2025 have marked significant steps in decentralizing governance, with the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies often securing a strong presence. Despite the reforms such as updates to the Haryana Municipal Election Rules (1978, amended in 2020) that have streamlined the process but women's participation in urban governance still remains limited ^[7]. Total 586 women representatives were elected in Haryana Urban Local Bodies held during 2016-2018. Out of 586 elected women, 25 women were elected from Rohtak district ^[8]. Despite reservation, many women representatives are unable to exercise real authority, as their roles are often controlled by proxy i.e. male family members. Strengthening women's capacities, encouraging their active involvement, and ensuring meaningful participation are essential for achieving true socio-economic, political, and urban development in Haryana ^[9].

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the political participation of women representatives in urban local bodies.
- To study factors contribute in political empowerment of women representatives in urban local bodies.

Research Methodology

Rohtak district of Haryana constitutes the universe of the present study. All the 22 elected women representatives have been taken into consideration by census method. An interview schedule method has been administered to collect the primary data. Secondary data has been collected from various government records and other sources. The study includes all the women representatives who got elected in the municipalities' elections held in 2025.

Urban Local Bodies Election, Rohtak 2025

The 2025 elections for urban local bodies (ULBs) saw a significant representation of women in leadership roles. The data highlights the number of elections conducted, reserved seats for women, elected women representatives and their overall percentage across different urban local bodies of Rohtak.

Table 1: Status of Women Representatives of Urban Local Bodies in Rohtak

Urban Local Bodies	Total Municipalities	Election conducted in 2025	Total ward	Reserved seats for women	Elected Women	Percentage of Elected women
Municipal Corporations	01	01	22	07	13	59.09
Municipal Councils	00	00	00	00	00	00
Municipal Committee	03	01	16	05	08	50
Total	04	02	38	12	21	55.26

Source: <https://ulbharyana.gov.in>>Rohtak

Table 1 provides an overview of the election results for urban local bodies in 2025, focusing on the number of reserved seats for women, the women elected, and the percentage of women elected across various municipalities. In Municipal Corporation Rohtak, election was conducted in 22 wards having 7 seats reserved for women. Out of these, 13 women were elected, which constitute 59.09 percent of the total. In Municipal Councils, no elections were held, resulting in no reserved seats or elected women. In Municipal Committees, elections were held only in one municipality having 16 wards, 5 of which were reserved for women. In this case, 8 women were elected constituting 50 percent of the elected representatives. In both urban local bodies, elections were held in 38 wards out of which 12 reserved seats for women. It is interesting to note that 21 women got elected which constitute 55.26 percent of the total.

Filling of Nomination Form

Filling of a nomination form is a key step in the election process where a candidate officially registers their intention to contest the election. The form typically requires personal details such as the candidate's name, age, address, and occupation, as well as information about their political party (if applicable) or as an independent candidate. The form may also require a declaration of eligibility, confirming that the candidate meets all the legal requirements to contest such as age, citizenship and no criminal record. Along with the form, candidates often need to deposit a fee and, in some cases, provide supporting documents like educational certificates or proof of identity. Once submitted, the nomination is reviewed by election officials to ensure whether all criteria are met. If approved, the candidate is officially listed on the ballot paper for the ensuing election [10].

Table 2: Filling of Nomination Form

Urban Local Bodies	Who filled your nomination form?			Total
	Self	Husband/ Relative	Advocate	
Rohtak Municipal Corporation	11 (84.62)	02 (15.38)	00	13 (100)
Kalanaur Municipal Committee	01 (11.11)	03 (33.33)	05 (55.56)	09 (100)
Total	12 (54.54)	05 (22.73)	05 (22.73)	22 (100)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Parentheses show percentage

Table 2 reveals that more than one-half (54.54 percent) of total elected women filled their nomination forms by themselves. In case of Rohtak Municipal Corporation, an overwhelming majority (84.62 percent) of elected women also replied affirmatively. It reflects a more independent approach in case of Rohtak urban local body. Whereas, more than one-fifth (22.73) of total elected women stated that their nomination forms have been filled by their husbands or relatives. One-third (33.33 percent) elected women of Kalanaur urban local body stated that their nomination form have been filled by their husband or relatives. While, more than one-fifth (22.73) of total elected women expressed that they relied on advocate to complete the process of nomination form. With respect to the

Kalanaur Municipal Committee, more than one-half (55.55 percent) of elected women admitted that they sought assistance from an advocate to fill their nomination form. It reveals that external support especially from advocates played a more significant role in the nomination process of women of Kalanaur urban local body. In concise, a majority of the elected women stated that their nomination forms have been filled by themselves.

Decision to Contest Election

Decision to contest an election is a critical and personal choice made by an individual who wishes to serve in a public office. This decision is typically influenced by several factors, including a desire to bring about change, represent the interests of a community, or pursue a career in politics. For many candidates, the decision to contest is driven by a sense of civic responsibility or the need to address specific issues affecting their locality. It may also be influenced by encouragement from political parties, family, friends, or mentors. Some candidates decide to contest elections because of dissatisfaction with current leadership or policies, while others see it as an opportunity to further their personal or professional aspirations. Ultimately, the decision involves a thorough consideration of one's own capabilities, resources, and the potential challenges and responsibilities that come with public office [11].

Table 3: Decision to Contest Election

Urban Local Bodies	Whose decision was it for you to contest the election?			Total
	Self	Family Member	Ward's Residents	
Rohtak Municipal Corporation	11 (84.62)	00	02 (15.38)	13 (100)
Kalanaur Municipal Committee	03 (33.33)	06 (66.67)	00	09 (100)
Total	14 (63.64)	06 (27.27)	02 (09.09)	22 (100)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Parentheses show percentage

Table 3 depicts that more than three-fifth (63.64 percent) of total elected women stated that the decision to contest the elections was taken by themselves. It shows that they took decision independently. However, a vast majority (84.62 percent) of elected women of Rohtak Municipal Corporation and one-third (33.33 percent) elected women of Kalanaur Municipal Committee also replied the same. In contrast, more than one-fourth (27.27 percent) of total elected women were influenced by their family members to contest the election. In Kalanaur Municipal Committee, two-third (66.67 percent) of elected women was fielded by their family member. It indicates that family support played a significant role in this regard. In nutshell, a majority of the elected women of urban local bodies stated that the decision to contest the elections was taken by themselves.

Participation in Election Campaign

Participation in an election campaign involves actively engaging in activities aimed at gaining support from voters and promoting the candidate's platform. This typically includes canvassing, attending rallies, making speeches, and engaging with the community through various forms of media or personal interactions. Candidates may also

participate in door-to-door campaigns, distribute flyers, hold public meetings, or organize events to raise awareness about their candidature. Campaigns often involve collaboration with volunteers, party members, and supporters who help spread the candidate's message. Participation in a campaign

also includes addressing key issues, answering voters' questions, and convincing them of the candidate's ability to effectively serve in public office. The level of participation can vary based on the candidate's resources, support network, and the political environment [12].

Table 4: Participation in Election Campaign

Urban Local Bodies	Total	Did you participate directly in the election campaign?		If yes, in what way did you directly participate?			N = 22
		Yes	No	Door-to-Door Campaign	Public Meetings	Door-to-Door Campaign + Public Meetings	
Rohtak Municipal Corporation	13 (100)	13 (100)	00	05 (38.46)	02 (15.38)	06 (46.16)	
Kalanaur Municipal Committee	09 (100)	08 (88.89)	01 (11.11)	02 (25.00)	01 (12.50)	05 (62.50)	
Total	22 (100)	21 (95.45)	01 (04.55)	07 (33.33)	03 (14.29)	11 (52.38)	

Source: Primary Data

Note: Parentheses show percentage

Table 4 discloses that an overwhelming majority (95.45 percent) of total elected women responded affirmatively on asking whether they participated directly in the election campaign. Further, cent percent of elected women of Rohtak Municipal Corporation and a vast majority (88.89 percent) of elected women of Kalanaur Municipal Committee also replied affirmatively.

Those who answered affirmatively were probed further as to in what way they participated directly in their election campaign. Out of these 21 elected women, more than one-half (52.38 percent) of the elected women stated that they followed door-to-door campaigns as well as hold public meetings in their wards during the election campaign. It reflects that elected women used multiple strategies to connect with voters. Less than one-half (46.16 percent) of elected women of Rohtak Municipal Corporation and more than three-fifth (62.50 percent) of elected women of Kalanaur Municipal Committee responded the same in this regard. However, one-third (33.33 percent) of elected women confirmed that they were involved in 'Door-to-Door' campaign alone. It was two-fifth (38.46 percent) and one-fourth (25.00 percent) of elected women of Rohtak Municipal Corporation and of Kalanaur Municipal Committee respectively answered the same in this regard. While more than one-tenth (14.29 percent) of these elected women claimed that they were engaged in holding public

meetings. It shows that public meetings alone were the least preferred mode during election campaign. Approximately similar percent (15.38 percent of Rohtak Municipal Corporation and 12.50 of Kalanaur Municipal Committee) of elected women of both urban local bodies replied the same. In brief, approximately all elected women admitted that they participated directly in their election campaign.

Contributing Factors in Winning Election

Several key factors contribute to the candidate's success in the election. These often include the candidate's ability to connect with voters, present a clear and compelling platform and demonstrate leadership qualities. One of the most important factors is public outreach, such as engaging with voters through door-to-door campaigns, media, and publishing the key issues affecting the public. Strong community relationships and support from influential persons or groups can also boost the candidate's chances of winning. Additionally, candidates who present a clear manifesto that addresses the concerns and needs of their constituents are often successful. Other factors include the candidate's reputation, resources for campaigning, and party support along with the political environment and voter turnout. Effective use of media and social platforms to communicate with a wider audience also plays a crucial role in this regard [13].

Table 5: Contributing Factors in Winning Election

Urban Local Bodies	According to you, which factor/s contributed significantly in winning of your election?					Total
	Political Background (A)	Personal Image (B)	Participation in Social Work (C)	B+C + Strategy (D)	A+B+C+D + Party Support	
Rohtak Municipal Corporation	01 (07.69)	02 (15.39)	01 (07.69)	04 (30.77)	05 (38.46)	13 (100)
Kalanaur Municipal Committee	02 (22.22)	02 (22.22)	00	02 (22.22)	03 (33.34)	09 (100)
Total	03 (13.64)	04 (18.18)	01 (04.55)	06 (27.27)	08 (36.36)	22 (100)

Source: Primary Data

Note: Parentheses show percentage

Table 5 highlights the factors contributing to the electoral success of the contestants. The data reveal that less than two-fifth (36.36 percent) of total elected women

acknowledged that the combination of political background, personal image, participation in social work, strategy and party support were the most significant factors in their

victory of urban local body election. Among respondents from Rohtak Municipal Corporation, less than two-fifth (38.46 percent) attributed their success to this all-inclusive factor. While slightly more than one-third (33.34 percent) of elected women of Kalanaur Municipal Committee agreed for same. The second most common factor was a combination of personal image, social work, and election strategy, cited by one-fourth (27.27 percent) of the total, with Rohtak and Kalanaur contributing less than one-third (30.77 percent) and more than one-fifth (22.22 percent) respectively. Interestingly, more than one-tenth (13.64 percent) of total elected women believed that political background alone led to their win. Similarly, personal image alone was considered a significant factor by less than one-fifth (18.18 percent) of total elected women. While a few (4.55 percent) representatives of total elected women emphasized that participation in social work alone is the

factor behind her success. This analysis reflects that while individual attributes such as background or social work matter, it is a holistic combination of personal effort and party support that most effectively ensures electoral success in local body elections.

Candidate's Schedule on Polling Day

On Election Day, a candidate's schedule is hectic with a variety of activities designed to attract the maximum voter turnout. The day often begins with an early morning address to energize the supporters, followed by visits to polling stations to greet voters and supporters. Throughout the day, the candidate participates in media interviews, making appearances on television, radio and social media to be in contact with maximum audience. The goal on election day is to maintain momentum, connect with voters, and ensure their supporters feel motivated to cast their ballots [14].

Table 6: Candidate's Schedule on Polling Day

Urban Local Bodies	Total	Were you an active candidate on polling day?		If yes, what did you do as an active candidate?			N = 22
		Yes	No	Booth Monitoring (A)	Encourage Voters (B)	Both (A+B)	
Rohtak Municipal Corporation	13 (100)	13 (100)	00	03 (23.08)	01 (07.69)	09 (69.23)	
Kalanaur Municipal Committee	09 (100)	08 (88.89)	01 (11.11)	03 (37.50)	00	05 (62.50)	
Total	22 (100)	21 (95.45)	01 (4.55)	06 (28.57)	01 (04.76)	14 (66.67)	

Source: Primary Data

Note: Parentheses show percentage

The data presented in table 6 reflects the involvement of candidates in different activities on election day. Almost all the (95.45 percent) elected women remained active on the polling day. Similar results were found in case of Rohtak Municipal Corporation and Kalanaur Municipal Committee. Those who replied affirmatively regarding it were probed further to find out their involvement in specific activities. Out of 21 respondents, slightly more than two-third (66.67 percent) elected women were engaged booth monitoring and motivating the voters. Approximately similar percentage (69.23 percent of Rohtak and 62.50 percent of Kalanaur) was damn busy on the day. To be specific, more than one-fourth (28.57 percent) of elected women monitored the booths including one-fifth (23.08 percent) of Rohtak Municipal Corporation and less than two-fifth (37.50 percent) of Kalanaur Municipal Committee. Overall, majority of the elected women stated that they were involved in both booth monitoring and voter encouragement efforts, with a small number focusing solely on individual activity.

Findings

- More than one-half (54.54 percent) of women representatives filed their nomination forms themselves, indicating that independent participation was more prominent in Rohtak, while support from others was taken in smaller towns like Kalanaur. (Table 2)
- Majority (63.64 percent) of women representatives decided independently to contest elections indicating growing political awareness. However, this trend was more vocal in Rohtak Municipal Corporation with 84.62 percent. (Table 3)

- An overwhelming majority (95.45 percent) of women representatives directly participated in election campaigns, reflecting high levels of political commitment. (Table 4)
- The most significant factor contributed to the electoral success of women representatives (36.36 percent) was a holistic combination of political background, personal image, social work, political strategies, and party support. This was more evident in Rohtak (38.46 percent) than in Kalanaur (33.34 percent). (Table 5)
- An overwhelming majority (95.45 percent) of women representatives were more actively involved on polling day, demonstrating their electoral acumen in the electoral process. (Table 6)
- Slightly more than two-third (66.67 percent) of women representatives were involved mainly in activities like booth monitoring and encouraging the voters which demonstrates their balanced approach for ensuring higher voter turnout. (Table 6)

Suggestions

- Capacity-building programs for women leaders be organized from time to time.
- Gender-sensitization in the working of Urban Local Bodies.
- Institutional support mechanisms (child care during meetings, safe transport, etc.) be arranged.
- The political parties may allow the women representatives to lead the development and welfare programmes by offering resources during the elections.

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